

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

THE HON. H. S. MAINE, LL. D.,

VICE-CHANCELLOR

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA,

TO THE

SENATE AND GRADUATES,

AT A

CONVOCATION FOR CONFERRING DEGREES,

On Saturday, the 17th of March, 1866.

CALCUTTA :

PRINTED AT THE BAPTIST MISSION PRESS.

1866.

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GENTLEMEN,

The only event of the past year in which I can expect you to take much interest from a University point of view, is the actual transfer to us of that munificent donation which I announced to you twelve months ago, at a time when there prevailed a rumour (which happily proved an idle rumour) of the donor's death. I attach an importance to that gift beyond its actual money value, as being possibly the first instalment of a series of benefactions on which this University will ultimately have to depend, if ever it becomes a national institution ; and I had hoped to have been able to describe to you to-day some practical use to which it had been put, or at all events, some practicable proposal for using it. But there is still some doubt as to the tenure on which it is to be held ; and until that is cleared up, we cannot tell with what body or authority rests the responsibility of determining the purposes to which the fund is to be devoted. Of course, I can offer nothing more than an opinion, and, perhaps, it would be improper in me even to offer that confidently. But, speaking generally, I hold to the view which I expressed last year, that, whether the money be spent upon new modes of teaching, as some think it should be, or whether it be spent in stimulating learning by the foundation of prizes and scholarships—that in whatever way it is spent, the study stimulated and encouraged should be the study of the sciences of experiment and observation. I am not going over the ground which was traversed last year, and indeed it is not necessary for me to do so, because the suggestion, that the sphere of physical science in native education should be enlarged, appears

to have been generally assented to. I know it has been said—and it is the only stricture which I have seen, and it is of a somewhat vague character—that this proposal to found education in great part upon physical science is too much in harmony with that material, hard, and unimaginative view of life which is beginning to be common in modern society. I admit that there is some truth in this in its application to Europe and England. But in contrasting England and India, in comparing the East and the West, we must sometimes bring ourselves to call evil good, and good evil. The fact is, that the educated Native mind requires hardening. That culture of the imagination, that tenderness for it, which may be necessary in the West, is out of place here; for this is a society in which, for centuries upon centuries, the imagination has run riot, and much of the intellectual weakness and moral evil which afflict it to this moment, may be traced to imagination having so long usurped the place of reason. What the Native mind requires, is stricter criteria of truth; and I look for the happiest moral and intellectual results from an increased devotion to those sciences by which no tests of truth are accepted, except the most rigid.

Gentlemen, the only other event which I have to announce—if I can dignify it with the name of an event—is the advance through another stage of the preparations of our University building. The plans for the building have now received full official sanction, and nothing now will probably delay the construction, except those impediments to rapid work which are common to all undertakings in India, whether they be public or private. I greatly regret the delay, and have from year to year stated in this place that I regretted it. But I think it just to say, that it may be explained by a naturally, and indeed, necessarily, imperfect appreciation of the rank which our claim to a building was entitled to hold among the many heavy demands for public works which press upon the Government of India. I do not suppose that anybody ever doubted, that the existence of a University without a local habitation was an

anomaly, or that we were entitled to a Hall for meetings like this. But, unless the thing was seen, it was quite impossible to understand what are the difficulties under which, for want of that building, the University labours in discharging the very simplest functions for which it exists. For myself, I confess that, until I was recently present at the Examinations, I could not have conceived the extraordinary meanness of the arrangements provided for holding them—and I know they were the only arrangements which could possibly have been made. But, gentlemen, what was more startling than the mere insufficiency of the accommodation—more striking than the fact that we had this year to hold our Examinations in the unfinished shell of the Post Office, and the fact that, if next year we cannot have the unfinished shell of the High Court, we shall be driven to tents on the maidan—what was far more impressive than this, was the amazing contrast between the accommodation and the extraordinary importance which these Examinations have acquired. The thing must be seen to be believed. I do not know which was more astonishing, more striking,—the multitude of the students, who, if not now, will soon have to be counted, not by the hundred, but by the thousand; or the keenness and eagerness which they displayed. For my part, I do not think anything of the kind has been seen by any European University since the Middle Ages—and I doubt whether there is anything founded by, or connected with, the British Government in India which excites so much practical interest in Native households of the better class, from Calcutta to Lahore, as the Examinations of this University.

Gentlemen, these are facts, and facts which are insufficiently appreciated in this country, and scarcely at all at home. The truth is that we, the British Government in India, the English in India, have for once in a way founded an Institution full of vitality; and by this University and by the other Universities, by the Colleges subordinate to them, and by the Department of Education, we are creating rapidly a multitudinous class, which

in the future will be of the most serious importance for good or for evil. And so far as this University is concerned, the success is not the less striking, because it is not exactly the success which was expected. It is perfectly clear, from the language which Lord Canning once employed in this place, in the early days of this University, that the institution, which he expected to come into being, was one which resembled the English Universities more than the University of Calcutta is likely to do for some time to come. Lord Canning's most emphatic words occurred in a passage, in which he said that he hoped the time was near when the nobility and upper classes of India would think that their children had not had the dues of their rank, unless they passed through the course of the University. Now there is no doubt that that view involved a mistake. The fact is, that the founders of the University of Calcutta thought to create an aristocratic Institution; and, in spite of themselves, they have created a popular Institution. The fact is so; and we must accept it as a fact, whatever we may think of it. But now, after the fact, now that we are wise by experience, it is not difficult to see that hardly anything else could have occurred. Gentlemen, it seems to me utterly idle to expect that, in a virgin field,—in a country new to all real knowledge—in a country in which learning, such as it was, being the close monopoly of a hereditary order, was in exactly the same position as if it did not exist, or existed at the other end of the world—it seems to me idle to expect that the love of learning would begin with the wealthy and the powerful. To suppose this, is to suppose that those who have no acute spur to exertion would voluntarily encounter that which in its first beginnings is the most distasteful of all exercises. Before you can diffuse education, you must create the sense of the value of it; and it is only when the beauty of the results is seen, when their positive and material importance is seen, and they get to be mingled with all the graces of life, that those who can do without knowledge begin to covet and respect it. There is nothing more certain, than that the English

Universities in their origin were extremely popular Institutions. Even if we could not infer the fact from the crowds which flocked to them, from the mere fact of the multitude, it would be perfectly plain from the pictures of University life preserved in the poetry of Chaucer, that the early students of Oxford and Cambridge were children of the people. And, gentlemen, the object of those students was exactly that which is sometimes imputed to our students, as if a censure was intended. It was simply to get on in life ; either to enter the Church which was then the only free field in Europe, or, a little later, to get into one of the clerkly professions that were rising up. But it was the example of the educated classes, the visible effects of education on manners and on material prosperity and its growing importance in politics which first attracted the nobility. Their first step was not to educate themselves. The first sign of interest which they showed was in the munificent endowments which they began to pour in upon learned Institutions ; and their next step was probably to engage learned men for the education of their children. But it was very slowly, and after much temporary reaction, that that state of things was at last reached, to which Lord Canning pointed, and under which it is undoubtedly true that the English nobility do put their children through the Universities, unless they have chosen a profession inconsistent with Academical training. But nothing could be more erroneous than to suppose, that even now Oxford and Cambridge are purely aristocratic institutions. Their endowments are so munificent, and their teaching now-a-days so excellent, that membership in them is profitable, and therefore popular ; and although noblemen do unquestionably compete there on equal terms with others, the condition of such competition is the existence of a class prompted by necessity or ambition to keep the prestige of learning before the eye. Lord Canning himself, no doubt, belonged to a class eminently characteristic of the English Universities. He was a nobleman who worked hard at Oxford, when he might have been idle. But the brilliant

and illustrious statesman who was Lord Canning's father belonged to a class even more characteristic of them—a class which, by the lustre it receives from learning and again reflects back on it, stimulates men of Lord Canning's order, men some of whose names are not unknown to India,—Lord Ellenborough, Lord Dalhousie, and Lord Elgin,—to follow its laborious example.

Gentlemen, I have admitted that we undoubtedly are creating a class of serious importance to the future of India, and of course the peculiarities and characteristics of that class are objects of fair criticism. One of the criticisms on this University, not uncommonly heard, that it has failed to conciliate the Native nobility, seems to me to be founded on a false estimate of past history, and therefore a false calculation of probabilities for the future. There are other objections. Some of them I do not purpose to notice, because they are simply vulgar. When, for example, it is said that the Native graduates of this and other Indian Universities are conceited, I wonder whether it is considered how young they are, compared with English graduates how wide is the difference which their education makes between them and their fellow countrymen, and therefore whether some such result might not to some extent be looked for in any climate or latitude. Certainly, the imputation which is sometimes made, that education saps the morality of the Natives, would be serious if it were true. But, not to speak of its being paradoxical on the face of it, it is against all the evidence that I (or any body else) have been able to collect. At all events, in one department of State, with which I have reason to be acquainted, it is almost a maxim governing promotion, that the better educated is a candidate for judicial employment, the less likely is he to be tainted with that corruption which was once the disgrace of the Indian Courts.

But the objection which is commonest, and which most intimately concerns us here, is, that the knowledge communicated by the subordinate Colleges and verified by this University is worthless, shallow, and superficial. The course of the Uni-

versity of Calcutta is sometimes said to be in fault, and it is alleged, to use a term at once expressive and fashionable, that it encourages "cramming." Now there are some things in our Calcutta course, of which I do not altogether approve. But it was settled after long discussion, shortly after I became Vice-Chancellor, and it would be absurd to be perpetually changing that which of all things ought to be fixed and permanent, on account of small defects which are, after all, disputable. But I wish to say something of the whole class of objections implied in that one word "cramming." If there is anything in them, you know, I suppose, that they have a far wider application than their application to this University. They are constantly urged against the numerous competitive systems which are growing up in England, and in particular against the system under which the Civil Service of India, probably the most powerful official body in the world, is recruited, and will be recruited.

Gentlemen, the discredit which has been successfully attached to certain systems by this word is a good illustration of the power of what a famous writer called dyslogistic expression, or, to put it more simply, of giving a thing a bad name. And here I must say, that the habit Englishmen have of importing into India these commonplace censorious opinions about systems and institutions, is a great misfortune for the Natives. Even in the mouths of the Englishmen who invented them, they generally have very little meaning, for they are based on a mere fragment of truth; when passed about among the multitude, they have still less; and, at last, when exported hither, and repeated by the Natives in a foreign tongue, they have simply no meaning at all.

As far as I understand the word, it means nothing more than the rapid communication of knowledge,—communication, that is to say, at a rate unknown till recently. Some people, I know, would add something to the definition; would say that cramming is the rapid communication of superficial knowledge, but the two statements will generally be found to be identical, and that they merely mean by superficial knowledge, knowledge which has been

rapidly acquired. The true point, the point which really has to be proved is, whether knowledge rapidly acquired is more easily forgotten than knowledge which has been slowly gained. The point is one upon which, to some extent, everybody can judge for himself or herself. I am rather surprised, however, at the readiness with which the affirmative has been usually taken for granted; no doubt, if it be true, it is a curious psychological fact, but surely there are some reasons for questioning the reality. It might plausibly be argued that knowledge slowly acquired, has been acquired at the cost of frequent intervals of inattention and forgetfulness. Now everybody knows that inattention and forgetfulness tend to become habits of the mind, and it might be maintained that these habits would be likely to recur, in association with a subject of thought, even when that subject has for once been successfully mastered. On the other hand, it might be contended that knowledge rapidly acquired has been necessarily acquired under a certain strain and tension of the mental faculties, and that the effects of this tension are not likely to be so readily lost and dissipated.

The simple truth is, that under the strong stimulus applied by that system of examinations by which the entrance to almost every English profession is now barred, there has sprung up an active demand for knowledge of a more varied description than was once coveted, and above all, for knowledge rapidly imbibed and mastered. To meet this demand, a class of teachers has sprung up who certainly produce remarkable results with remarkable rapidity. I hear it said, that they are men of a far lower order of mind and accomplishment than the teachers who follow the old methods. I can well believe it; but that only renders the probability greater, that some new power has been brought into play. I am afraid it must be allowed, that no art, of equal importance to mankind, has been so little investigated scientifically as the art of teaching. No art is in the hands of practitioners who are so apt to follow so blindly in the old paths. I say this with the full recollection that there has been great

improvement in England lately, and that the books of teaching, most in use, have been purged of many gross errors both of statement and of method. But one line of enquiry there is which has never been sufficiently followed, though one would have thought it antecedently the most promising of all,—the study of the human mind through actual observation, and the study of the expedients by which its capacity for receiving and retaining knowledge may be enlarged. That field of investigation has been almost wholly neglected, and therefore it may just be that we are on the eve of great discoveries in education, and that the processes of these teachers are only a rough anticipation of the future. The fact that the methods of teaching followed in England are almost wholly empirical, that, for the most part they entirely neglect individual differences of character and temperament, that they certainly work counter to the known laws according to which some of the mental faculties operate,—for example, the memory—all these facts seem to my mind to point at possibilities and chances of improvement, which a few persons, by expedients which, I frankly allow, seem even to me somewhat ignoble, have perhaps had the good fortune to realize beforehand.

You will see, then, that the problem, whether what is called cramming is an unmixed evil, is not yet settled even in England. But, in India, the commonplace imputations against it seem to me simply without meaning of any kind. There is no proof whatever that Indian teachers follow any special methods of any sort. What appears to be meant is, that Natives of India learn with singular rapidity. The fact may be so, though for my part, I doubt whether they learn with greater rapidity than English lads who once put their hearts into their work ; and it may be also true, as some allege so positively, that their precocity is compensated by a greater bluntness of the faculties later in life. But be this true or not, it has no sort or kind of connection with the disadvantages of cramming.

If, indeed, a student be taught or teach himself to put on the

appearance of knowledge, when he has it not,—if he learns to cover ignorance by ambiguous phrases, or to obtain an undue preference by pandering to the known crotchets or fancies of the examiner, the process and the result are alike evil ; but they have no bearing on the point I have been discussing. They are simply a fraud ; but I must say that the experience of those who know best is, that such frauds succeed, not through any special skill in the teacher, or any fault in the course of examination, but through the fault of the examiner. I say, and I say all the more strongly, because I have not the smallest justification for imputing it to the examiners of this University, that no erroneous modes of teaching, no faulty selection of books or subjects, can do a tenth part of the mischief and injustice entailed by the indulgence of vanity, or crotchettiness, or affectation, or indolence, on the part of the examiners.

If I had any complaint to make of the most highly educated class of Natives,—the class I mean which has received the highest European education,—a class to which our University has hardly as yet contributed many members (because it is too modern), but to which it will certainly make large additions one day—I should assuredly not complain of their mode of acquiring knowledge, or of the quality of that knowledge (except that it is too purely literary and not sufficiently scientific), or of any evil effects it may have on their character, or manners, or habits. I should rather venture to express disappointment at the use to which they sometimes put it. It seems to me that not seldom they employ it for what I can best describe as irrationally reactionary purposes. It is not to be concealed, and I see plainly that educated Natives do not conceal from themselves, that they have, by the fact of their education, broken for ever with much in their history, much in their customs, much in their creed. Yet I constantly read, and sometimes hear, elaborate attempts on their part to persuade themselves and others, that there is a sense in which these rejected portions of Native history, and usage, and belief, are perfectly in harmony with the modern

knowledge which the educated class has acquired, and with the modern civilisation to which it aspires. Very possibly, this may be nothing more than a mere literary feat, and a consequence of the over-literary education they receive. But whatever the cause, there can be no greater mistake, and, under the circumstances of this country, no more destructive mistake.

Now I would not be understood to complain of the romantic light in which educated Hindus sometimes read their past history. It is very difficult for any people to feel self-respect, if they have no pride in their own annals. But this feeling, which I quite admit to be healthy when reasonably indulged, becomes unwholesome, and absurd too, when pushed to the extravagant length to which I sometimes see it driven here. There are some educated Native gentlemen who seem to have persuaded themselves, that there was once a time in India in which learning was more honoured and respected, and when the career of a learned man was more brilliant, than in British India and under British rule. They seem to believe, or they try to believe, that it was better to be a Brahmin or a scribe attached to the Court of some half mythical Hindu king, than to follow one of the prosaic learned professions which the English have created. Now thus much is certain. Although there is much in common between the present and the past, there is never so much in common as to make life tolerable to the men of the present, if they could step back into the past. There is no one in this room to whom the life of a hundred years since would not be acute suffering, if it could be lived over again. It is impossible even to imagine the condition of an educated Native, with some of the knowledge and many of the susceptibilities of the 19th century—indeed, perhaps, with too many of them—if he could recross the immense gulf which separates him from the India of Hindu poetry, if indeed it ever existed. The only India, in fact, to which he could hope to return—and that retrogression is not beyond the range of conceivable possibilities—is the India of Mahratta robbery and Mahomedan rule.

I myself believe that European influences are, in great measure, the source of these delusions. The value attached in Europe to ancient Hindu literature, and deservedly attached for its poetical and philological interest, has very naturally caused the Native to look back with pride and fondness on the era at which the great Sanscrit poems were composed and great philosophical systems evolved. But unquestionably this tendency has its chief root in this,—that the Natives of India have caught from us Europeans our modern trick of constructing, by means of works of fiction, an imaginary past out of the present, taking from the past its externals, its outward furniture, but building in the sympathies, the susceptibilities, and even (for it sometimes comes to that) the knowledge of the present time. Now this is all very well for us Europeans. It is true that, even with us, it may be that too much of the sloughed skin of the Past hangs about us, and impedes and disorders our movements. At the same time, the activity of social life in Europe is so exuberant, that no serious or sustained disadvantage arises from our pleasing ourselves with pictures of past centuries, more or less unreal and untrue. But, here, the effect of such fictions, and of theories built on such fictions, is unmixedly deleterious. On the educated Native of India, the Past presses with too awful and terrible a power for it to be safe for him to play or palter with it. The clouds which overshadow his household, the doubts which beset his mind, the impotence of progressive advance which he struggles against, are all part of an inheritance of nearly unmixed evil which he has received from the Past. The Past cannot be coloured by him in this way, without his misreading the present and endangering the Future.

A similar mistake is committed by educated Natives, when they call in ingenious analogies and subtle explanations to justify usages which they do not venture to defend directly, or of which in their hearts they disapprove. I am not now referring to some particularly bad examples of this, though doubtless one does sometimes see educated Native writers glorifying by fine names

things which are simply abominable. But I allude to something less revolting than this. There are Native usages, not in themselves open to heavy moral blame, which every educated man can see to be strongly protective of ignorance and prejudice. I perceive a tendency to defend these, sometimes on the ground that occasionally and incidentally they serve some slight practical use, sometimes because an imaginative explanation of them can be given, sometimes and more often for the reason that something superficially like them can be detected in European society. I admit that this tendency is natural and even inevitable. The only influence which could quite correct it, would be the influence of European ideas conveyed otherwise than through books ; in fact through social intercourse. But the social relations between the two races, at least of India, are still in so unsatisfactory a condition, that there is no such thing, or hardly such a thing, as mixed Native and European society. A late colleague of mine, Sir Charles Trevelyan, thought that things in this respect were worse when he was lately here than when he was first here. When he was first here, he saw educated Natives mixing on equal terms with educated Europeans. But when he came out a second time to India, there was nothing of the kind. But perhaps that happier state of things was caused by the very smallness of educated Native society. As educated society among Natives has become larger, it has been more independent of European society, more self-sufficing, and as is always the case under such circumstances, its peculiarities and characteristics are determined, in part, by its least advanced sections. But I must impress this on you that, in a partnership of that kind, in a partnership between the less and more advanced, it is not the more advanced but the less advanced, not the better but the worse, that gains by glossing over an unjustifiable prejudice, a barbarous custom, or a false opinion. There is no greater delusion than to suppose that you weaken an error by giving it a colour of truth. On the contrary, you give it pertinacity and vitality, and greater power for evil. •

I know that what I have been saying can hardly have much significance or force for the actual graduates of this University. There are few of them who can be old enough to be exercising that influence, literary or social, of which I have been speaking, and to which their countrymen are so amenable. But hereafter they may have occasion to recall my observations. If ever it occurs to them that there was once an India in which their lot would have been more brilliant or more honorable than it is now likely to be, let them depend upon it they are mistaken. To be the astrologer, or the poet, or the chronicler of the most heroic of mythical Indian princes (even if we could suppose him existing) would be intolerable even to a comparatively humble graduate of this University. They may be safely persuaded that, in spite of discouragements which do not all come from themselves or their countrymen, their real affinities are with Europe and the Future, not with India and the Past. They would do well for once for all to acquiesce in it, and accept, with all its consequences, the marvellous destiny which has brought one of the youngest branches of the greatest family of mankind from the uttermost ends of the earth to renovate and educate the oldest. There is not yet perfect sympathy between the two, but intellectual sympathy, in part the fruit of this University, will come first, and moral and social sympathy will surely follow afterwards.
